

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 024951

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (WRONG DRAFTING AND APPROVING OFFICE  
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QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 499

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, IS, US

SUBJ: SYRIAN PERCEPTIONS OF ISRAEL

REF: 75 TEL AVIV 6754

1. SUMMARY: SYRIAN MISCONCEPTIONS OF ISRAEL ARE JUST  
AS GREAT AS THOSE OF THE ISRAELIS TOWARD SYRIA (REFTEL).  
THEY INCLUDE FEAR OF EXPANSIONIST DRIVE TO REALIZE  
GREATER ISRAEL, PROPENSITY ALWAYS TO READ THE  
WORST INTO PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF ISRAELI POLITICANS,  
CONVICTION THAT ISRAEL INTERFERING IN LEBANESE  
DOMESTIC TURMOIL, AND PERCEPTION THAT ARABS AND  
SEPHARDIC JEWS ARE BEING DELIBERATELY KEPT IN  
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STATUS OF SECOND-CLASS ISRAELI CITIZENS. SYRIANS

ALSO PERCEIVE NEGOTIATIONS AS WIN/LOST EXERCISE WHERE ONE SIDE'S LOSS EQUATES WITH "ENEMY'S" GAIN, REFLECTION IN PART PERHAPS OF THEIR PRESENT INCAPACITY TO UNDERSTAND ISRAELI SOCIETY. THEIR GENERAL VIEW OF A FUTURE PEACE IS LIMITED TO SYRIAN WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT ISRAEL'S EXISTENCE RATHER THAN TO PLAN FOR A DYNAMIC INTER-RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO NEIGHBORING STATES. THEY HOLD ISRAELIS TO BE HYPOCRITICAL REGARDING ISSUE OF PALESTINIAN TERRORISM AND UNWILLING TO PREPARE PUBLIC OPINION FOR EVENTUAL WITHDRAWAL OR COMPROMISE. THERE ARE, NONETHELESS, A FEW SIGNS THAT MORE SOPHISTICATED VIEWS OF ISRAEL MAY BE DEVELOPING. END SUMMARY.

2. WHILE PUBLIC OPINION IN SYRIA PLAYS A FAR LESS DIRECT ROLE IN INFLUENCING LEADERSHIP'S DECISIONS THAN IT DOES IN ISRAEL, THE WAY ORDINARY SYRIANS VIEW ISRAEL HAS AND WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT IMPACT ON WAY SARG VIEWS POST UNSC DEBATE PERIOD. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS OF ISRAELIS TOWARD SYRIA, ANALYZED IN EMBASSY TEL AVIV'S EXCELLENT 6754, ARE MATCHED BY SIMILAR SYRIAN MENTAL BLOCKS TOWARD ISRAEL. SYRIAN DISTRUST OF ISRAEL AND ITS INTENTIONS GOES BACK AT LEAST TO ISRAELI TREATMENT OF DEMILITARIZED ZONES UNDER 1949 ARMISTICE AGREEMENT. SYRIANS MAINTAIN THAT IMAGE ISRAEL PORTRAYED TO WEST OF INNOCENT ISRAELI FARMERS SUBJECTED TO REGULAR AND INDISCRIMINATE SHELLING BY SYRIAN ARTILLERY AND SHARPSHOOTERS ON GOLAN HEIGHTS WAS DELIBERATELY FABRICATED MYTH. THEY TALK OF THE "CREEPING OCCUPATION" OF THE DMZ'S AND COMPLAIN THE WORLD HAS FORGOTTEN HOW ISRAEL MOVED TO ABSORB THE DMZ'S IN 1950-55. THEY SIMILARLY CATEGORIZE ISRAELI ACCUSATIONS OF SYRIAN MISTREATMENT OF POWS AFTER 1973 WAR, AND CONTINUING ISRAELI PROPAGANDA REGARDING REPRESSION OF SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, AS INTENTIONAL MISREPRESENTATION AND OVERSTATEMENT. IN RETURN THEY LEVEL CHARGES OF BRUTALITY AGAINST SYRIAN POWS BY ISRAELIS AND OF DISCRIMINATION WITHIN ISRAEL AGAINST ISRAELI ARABS AND SEPHARDIC JEWS. ONE

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CONTINUES TO HEAR THE OLD MYTHS REGARDING ISRAEL FROM SYRIAN TONGUES -- THAT ISRAELI POLICY IS FUNDAMENTALLY EXPANSIONIST WITH AIM OF ESTABLISHING LAND OF GREATER ISRAEL. (CBS COMMENTATOR MIKE WALLACE, WE UNDERSTAND, WAS ASSURED OF EXISTENCE OF KNESSET MAP SHOWING NILE-TO-EUPHRATES EMPIRE BY ASAD HIMSELF ONLY DAYS AGO.) ALTHOUGH MAJORITY OF SYRIANS AS YET UNABLE DIFFERENTIATE AMONG ISRAELI

POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES, THEY SEE ESTABLISHMENT OF SETTLEMENTS ON GOLAN AND WEST BANK AS SUFFICIENT CONFIRMATION OF THIS PERCEPTION AND ALSO ISRAEL'S REFUSAL TO ATTEND RECENT UNSC DEBATE. THEY FEAR FURTHER ISRAELI EXPANSION INTO SOUTHERN LEBANON.

4. ANOTHER TENET OF FAITH IS BELIEF THAT ISRAEL AND AMERICAN ZIONISTS WIELD IRRESISTIBLE INFLUENCE OVER U.S. MIDDLE EASTERN POLICY TO DETRIMENT OF U.S. REGIONAL AND GLOBAL INTERESTS. WHILE SOME CONTINUE TO HOLD VIEW THAT U.S. IS BENEFITTING FROM MAINTAINING ISRAEL AS "OUTPOST OF WESTERN IMPERIALISM" MOST SYRIANS PROFESS SEE RELATIONSHIP AS ONE-WAY STREET IN DIRECTION OF TEL AVIV, WITH U.S. OBTAINING MINIMAL BENEFIT IN RETURN. THEY ARE FOND OF TICKING OFF MATERIAL ADVANTAGES TO U.S. OF CLOSER RELATIONSHIP TO ARABS -- GREATER COMMERCIAL PROSPERITY, MORE STABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR GLOBAL INVESTMENT OF PETRO-DOLLARS, ETC. -- WHILE ASKING WHAT MATERIAL BENEFIT U.S. DERIVES FROM ITS CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH ISRAEL. THIS IS THE OVERSIMPLIFIED VIEW OF SYRIAN PUBLIC. LEADERSHIP DURING PAST TWO YEARS HAS BEGUN, IF ONLY JUST, TO DEVELOP MORE SOPHISTICATED UNDERSTANDING OF U.S. POLITICAL PROCESSES AND TO ENTERTAIN SERIOUSLY CONCEPT THAT U.S. DOES NOT DESIGN AND PURSUE ITS ME POLICY WITH ONLY ISRAELI NATIONAL INTERESTS IN MIND.

5. SYRIAN PERCEPTIONS OF POST-SETTLEMENT RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL ARE UNFORMED AND LIKELY TO CREATE ADDITIONAL OBSTACLES IN ANY NEGOTIATING PROCESS. MOST COMMON SYRIAN VIEW OF SYRIAN-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS  
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IS ONE IN WHICH ONE SIDE'S COMPROMISES TRANSLATE DIRECTLY INTO "ENEMY" GAIN. THERE IS AS YET NO CONCEPT OF FUTURE BILATERAL TIES AS DYNAMIC INTER-RELATIONSHIP OF CULTURAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ELEMENTS SUCH AS CHARACTERIZE FOR EXAMPLE RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF SYRIAN-JORDANIAN RELATIONS. AFTER PEACE SETTLEMENT, WHICH SYRIAN LEADERS SEE AS RECOGNIZING ISRAEL'S EXISTENCE BUT NOT REQUIRING ESTABLISHMENT FORMAL RELATIONS, SYRIA WOULD HOPE IGNORE ISRAEL AND HAVE AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE TO DO WITH HER.

6. SYRIANS OFTEN ILL-INFORMED ABOUT ISRAEL BUT SOME ARE BEGINNING TO SHOW INTEREST IN ISRAEL AS SOCIETY AND ISRAELIS AS PEOPLE. IT IS NOT ONLY SENIOR SARG OFFICIALS WHO ARE REGULAR LISTENERS

TO RADIO ISRAEL. WE UNDERSTAND THERE IS NOW A RESPECTABLE AND PROTECTED CAREER FOR OFFICERS IN DEFENSE MINISTRY WHO ARE EQUIPPED TO ANALYZE ISRAELI PRESS AND POL-MIL DEVELOPMENTS. THERE IS STILL A TENDENCY, HOWEVER, TO LOOK FOR WORST IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF ISRAELI POLITICIANS AND INTERPRET THEM IN MOST ANTI-SYRIAN MANNER. ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IS SEEN AS DOING LITTLE TO PREPARE ITS PUBLIC OPINION FOR ANY SORT OF WITHDRAWAL OR COMPROMISE.

7. SYRIANS TEND TO EXHIBIT MOST EMOTIONALISM OVER PALESTINIAN ISSUE. ISRAELI PREFERRED DESCRIPTION OF PLO AS "TERRORISTS" IS SEEN AS DEEPEST HYPOCRISY, GIVEN ROLE TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS PLAYED IN ISRAEL'S OWN HISTORY. ISRAELI WILLINGNESS TO DEAL WITH PLO IN RESOLVING PALESTINIAN ISSUE IS WIDELY VIEWED AS LITMUS TEST OF ISRAELI POLICY AND WHETHER GOI GENUINELY WISHES TO SETTLE CONFLICT WITH ARABS THROUGH NEGOTIATION.

8. SYRIANS ARE WILL AWARE OF THEIR MILITARY AND TECHNOLOGICAL INFERIORITY TO ISRAEL. FONMIN KHADDAM'S OFTEN EXPRESSED OUTRAGE THAT SYRIAN LAND REMAINS UNDER OCCUPATION IS A MEASURE OF HIS FRUSTRATION OVER PRESENT SYRIAN AND ARAB IMPOTENCE. YET SYRIANS  
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GENERALLY ARE CONVINCED THAT THEY ARE CLOSING DEVELOPMENT GAP AND THAT TIME IS ON THEIR SIDE. THEY POINT TO THEIR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND RAPIDLY EXPANDING EDUCATION SYSTEM TO SUPPORT THIS BELIEF. THEY PROFESS READINESS TO BE PATIENT OVER REGAINING THEIR LAND AND SECURING "ARAB RIGHTS", CLAIMS APPARENTLY BELIED BY THEIR RECENT UNSC PERFORMANCE, ALTHOUGH ON THAT OCCASION THEY MAY WELL HAVE BEEN IN LARGE PART POSTURING FOR ARAB AND THIRD WORLD CONSUMPTION. THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP UNQUESTIONABLY UNDERSTANDS MIDDLE EASTERN POLITICAL AND MILITARY REALITIES BETTER THAN IT ALLOWS ITS SPOKESMEN TO IMPLY.  
MURPHY UNQUOTE K

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